



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

**CAROTENOID PROFILES AND PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATION ON
CAROTENOID BIOSYNTHESIS IN THE OIL PALM
(*ELAEIS GUINEENSIS*) MESOCARP**

JANE SONIA KAUR

FPSK (M) 2002 4

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By

JANE SONIA KAUR

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia,
in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science
Universiti Putra Malaysia**

March 2002





For my Dad & Mom.....

Here is the endeavour of my absences



Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment
of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science

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Chairman: Associate Professor Ong King Kok, Ph.D.

Faculty: Medicine and Health Science

The oil palm fruit is one of the richest sources of carotenoids. However, little is known about the pathway for carotenoid synthesis in the oil palm. Therefore, the aim of this study is to provide some basic information on carotenoid synthesis in the oil palm mesocarp. In order to do so, we needed to firstly extract carotenoids from the oil palm mesocarp. A technique for extracting carotenoids from the oil palm mesocarp was optimised. Cold saponification was used to remove unwanted lipid materials from the crude carotenoid extract. Ultra violet-Visible (UV-Vis) spectrophotometry was utilized to compare the absorbance profiles of the carotenoid extracts of oil palm fruits at different stages of development i.e 15-20 weeks after anthesis (WAA). The results showed that in unripe oil palm fruit, carotenoids absorb strongly in the UV range while in ripe fruit the carotenoids absorb strongly in the visible range as more carotenoids are formed. Reverse phase high pressure liquid chromatography (RP-HPLC) coupled with a photo-diode array (PDA) detector was used in this study for characterizing the carotenoid profiles of

the saponified carotenoid extracts of the oil palm mesocarp at different stages of development. The saponified carotenoid extracts were separated on both C18 and C30 columns and the results of the HPLC separations showed that separation on the C30 column was better as it yielded more peaks in all the saponified carotenoid extracts. α -Carotene, β -carotene and their isomers were identified in all the saponified extracts. Lycopene was not detected in any of the saponified carotenoid extracts. Thus, it can be concluded that lycopene is not present in oil palm fruit. In order to understand carotenoid biosynthesis in oil palm mesocarp, the incorporation of various ^{14}C -labelled substrates into carotenoids in the mesocarp slices of 20-WAA oil palm fruits was carried out. Incorporation studies showed that isopentenyl pyrophosphate (IPP) is the main intermediate for carotenoid synthesis in oil palm fruits. Thin layer chromatography (TLC) was carried out to study the flow of the various radiolabelled substrates into the carotenoid fractions. The results of this study suggested that carotenoid synthesis in oil palm fruits follows the acetate/mevalonate pathway.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Master Sains

**PROFIL KAROTENOID DAN KAJIAN PERMULAAN TERHADAP
BIOSINTESIS KAROTENOID DALAM MESOKARPA
POKOK SAWIT (*ELAEIS GUINEENSIS*)**

Oleh

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Buah sawit merupakan salah satu sumber yang kaya dengan karotenoid. Namun, tidak banyak yang diketahui tentang tapak jalan untuk sintesis karotenoid dalam buah sawit. Oleh itu, tujuan utama kajian ini adalah untuk memberikan maklumat asas berkenaan dengan sintesis karotenoid dalam mesokarpa pokok sawit. Untuk memenuhi tujuan ini, pengekstrakan karotenoid daripada mesokarpa buah sawit dijalankan terlebih dahulu. Satu teknik pengekstrakan karotenoid daripada mesokarpa buah sawit telah dioptimumkan. Saponifikasi sejuk telah dilakukan untuk menyingkir bahan lipid yang tidak dikehendaki daripada ekstrak mentah karotenoid. Spektrofotometri cahaya nampak-ultra lembayung (UV-Vis) telah digunakan untuk membandingkan profil penyerapan ekstrak karotenoid dalam buah sawit pada peringkat perkembangan buah yang berlainan iaitu 15 hingga 20 minggu selepas antesis (WAA). Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa karotenoid dalam buah belum masak menyerap lebih dalam lingkungan cahaya ultra lembayung sementara karotenoid dalam buah masak menyerap lebih dalam lingkungan cahaya nampak

disebabkan oleh pembentukan lebih banyak karotenoid. Kromatografi cecair bertekanan tinggi-fasa berbalik (RP-HPLC) dengan gandingan pengesan 'array' foto-diod (PDA) telah digunakan dalam kajian ini untuk mencirikan profil karotenoid dalam ekstrak karotenoid pada peringkat perkembangan berlainan yang telah disaponifikasikan. Pemisahan ekstrak karotenoid telah dijalankan dengan menggunakan kolum C18 dan C30. Hasil pemisahan menunjukkan bahawa kolum C30 adalah lebih baik kerana ia dapat memperolehi lebih banyak puncak dalam kesemua ekstrak karotenoid. Karotenoid yang telah dikenalpasti dalam kesemua ekstrak karotenoid adalah α -karotena, β -karotena serta isomernya. 'Lycopene' tidak dapat dikesan dalam kesemua ekstrak karotenoid. Oleh itu, dapat disimpulkan bahawa 'lycopene' tidak wujud dalam buah sawit. Bagi tujuan memahami biosintesis karotenoid dalam mesokarpa pokok sawit, pelbagai substrat yang dilabelkan dengan isotop ^{14}C telah dimasukkan ke dalam hirisan mesokarpa 20-WAA. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa isopentasil pirofosfat (IPP) merupakan bahan perantaraan utama bagi sintesis karotenoid dalam buah sawit. Teknik pemisahan kromatografi lapisan nipis (TLC) telah dilakukan ke atas kesemua ekstrak karotenoid 20-WAA yang telah dilabel dengan pelbagai substrat ^{14}C , untuk menentukan tapak jalan biosintesis karotenoid dalam buah sawit. Keputusan mencadangkan bahawa tapak jalan biosintesis karotenoid dalam buah sawit mengikut tapak jalan asetat/mevalonat.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my utmost sincere gratitude to my supervisory committee, Assoc. Prof Dr Ong King Kok, Dr. Ravigadevi Sambanthamurthi and Prof. Dr. Khor Hun Teik for their invaluable guidance, support, helpful comments and intellectual contributions throughout the project and in the preparation of this dissertation

I would also like to say many thanks to my colleagues, Emily and Andy and also to Dr. Ravi's supporting staff at MPOB for all their support and help. Also, a big thank you to both Mr Hong (Research Instruments) and Mr Ang (Jones Chromatography) for their advice and technical support

I would like to acknowledge the contribution of the Malaysia-MIT Biotechnology Partnership Program (MMBPP) for providing financial support to the project and to the Malaysian Palm Oil Board (MPOB) for providing a conducive lab environment to conduct my research, making this masters program possible for me.

My deepest love and gratitude is forwarded to my loving parents; Gurchan & Cecilia and my baby sister Jasmin, for their undying love, concern, endless support and encouragement. A special thanks goes out to my uncle Soo Khian and aunt Mary for their continual support and concern. Also, not forgetting my other half, Shiaw Kong, for keeping me sane and for reminding me to keep my perspectives on what is worthwhile in life and for his undeniable love and support. I love you sayang.

Sincere thanks to all my friends for their love, support, encouragement and concern and most importantly, for their friendships. Thank you for enriching my life.

Last but not least, I would like to thank God for spiritually sustaining me and guiding me throughout my study.

I certify that an Examination Committee met on 6th March 2002 to conduct the final examination of Jane Sonia Kaur on her Master of Science thesis entitled "Carotenoid Profiles and Preliminary Investigation on Carotenoid Biosynthesis in the Oil Palm (*Elaeis guineensis*) Mesocarp" in accordance with Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Act 1980 and Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Regulations 1981. The Committee recommends that the candidate be awarded the relevant degree. Members of the Examination Committee are as follows:

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis is based on my original work except for quotations and citations which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted for any other degree at UPM or other institutions.



Jane Sonia Kaur

Date: 5 April 2002

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
DEDICATION	ii
ABSTRACT	iii
ABSTRAK	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vii
APPROVAL SHEETS	ix
DECLARATION FORM	xi
LIST OF TABLES	xv
LIST OF FIGURES	xvi
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	xx
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION	1
2 LITERATURE REVIEW	4
2.1 Origin of Carotenoids	4
2.2 Roles/Functions of Carotenoids	4
2.3 The Use of Carotenoids	5
2.4 Sources of Carotenoids	6
2.5 Carotenoid Distribution and Profile in Fruits	6
2.6 Bioavailability and Bioconversion of Carotenoids in Humans	7
2.7 Carotenoids in Human Diet and Its Benefits	8
2.7.1 Palm Oil Carotenoids	8
2.7.2 Other Carotenoids	9
2.8 The Carotenoid Biosynthesis Pathway	10
2.9 Classic Pathway versus Novel Pathway of Carotenoid Biosynthesis	17
2.10 Extraction of Carotenoids	19
2.11 Saponification	20
2.12 Analysis of Carotenoids	21
2.12.1 Ultra Violet-Visible (UV-Vis) Spectrophotometry	21
2.12.2 Thin Layer Chromatography (TLC)	22
2.12.3 High Pressure Liquid Chromatography (HPLC)	23
2.13 Current and Future Aspects of Biotechnology and Its Benefits Through Manipulation of the Carotenoid Biosynthesis Pathway	28

3	MATERIALS AND METHODS	31
3.1	Materials	31
3.1.1	Oil Palm Fruits	31
3.1.2	Radioisotopes	31
3.1.3	Chemical Reagents	31
3.1.4	Carotene Standards	32
3.1.5	Thin Layer Chromatography (TLC) Plates	32
3.2	Methods	32
3.2.1	Tagging of Fruits	32
3.2.2	Special Precautions when Working with Carotenoid Samples to Minimise Oxidation	32
3.2.3	Extraction of Carotenoids from the Oil Palm Mesocarp	33
3.2.4	Cold Saponification	36
3.2.5	UV-Vis Spectrophotometry of Oil Palm Carotenoids	37
3.2.6	Thin Layer Chromatography (TLC)	38
3.2.7	High Pressure Liquid Chromatography (HPLC) Analysis of Carotenoids	40
3.2.8	Studies on Carotenoid Biosynthesis Using Radiolabelled Substrates	42
3.2.9	Investigation of the Flow of Various Radiolabelled Substrates into Carotenoid Fractions by TLC	44
3.2.10	Statistical Design	45
4	RESULTS AND DISCUSSION	46
4.1	Extraction of Carotenoids from the Oil Palm Mesocarp	46
4.2	Comparison of Carotenoid Extraction Procedures Using Two Different Solvent Systems	50
4.3	Comparison of Absorbance Spectra of Carotenoid Extracts Before and After Saponification	51
4.4	Comparison of Carotenoid Absorbance Profile at Different Stages of Fruit Development	54
4.5	Quantification of β -carotene Content in Carotenoid Extracts by UV-Vis Absorbance Spectrophotometry	56
4.6	Separation of Carotenoids by Thin Layer Chromatography (TLC)	62
4.7	Separation of Carotenoids by High Pressure Liquid Chromatography (HPLC)	69
4.7.1	Reverse Phase High Pressure Liquid Chromatography (RP-HPLC) on a C18 Genesis Column	69
4.7.2	Comparison of the Carotenoid Profile of Carotenoid Extracts of Oil Palm Fruits at Different Stages of Development Obtained from Separation on a C18 Genesis Column	72

4.7.3	Comparison of the Three-Dimensional (3D) Carotenoid Profile of Carotenoid Extracts of Oil Palm Fruits (15-WAA to 20-WAA) Obtained from Separation on the C18 Genesis Column	77
4.8	Analysis of the Carotenoid Profile of Oil Palm Fruits at Different Stages of Development Using a C30 Bischoff Column	86
4.9	Comparison of the Three-Dimensional (3D) Carotenoid Profile of Carotenoid Extracts of Oil Palm Fruits (15-WAA to 20-WAA) Obtained from Separation on the C30 Bischoff Column	96
4.10	RP-HPLC Analysis of Saponified 20-WAA Carotenoid Extract and Crude 20-WAA Carotenoid Extract on a C30 Bischoff Column	105
4.11	Studies on Carotenoid Biosynthesis in the Oil Palm Mesocarp Using Various ¹⁴ C-Labelled Substrates	107
4.12	Investigation of the Flow of Various Radiolabelled Substrates into Carotenoid Fractions of the 20-WAA Carotenoid Extract by TLC	115
5	CONCLUSION	119
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	123
	BIODATA OF THE AUTHOR	133

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1 Effects of pH of the extracting medium on the extraction of carotenoids (with reference to β -carotene content) from the mesocarp of 17-WAA oil palm fruits into the acetone-buffer mixture	47
2 Different proportions of extraction media in relative to weight of sample used are represented as samples A, B, C and D. The absorbance for the sample extracts using the different proportions, was analyzed at 256 nm and 446 nm	49
3 Absorbance for both crude 20-WAA extract (non-saponified) and saponified 20-WAA extract at 256 nm and 446 nm	53
4 The absorbance and total carotene content (with reference to β -carotene) for carotenoid extracts at different stages of maturity (15-WAA to 20-WAA)	60
5 Results of ^{14}C -acetate (1 μCi) incorporation into 20-WAA tissue slice system	108
6 Results of ^{14}C -G3P (0.25 μCi) incorporation into 20-WAA tissue slice system	109
7 Results of ^{14}C -IPP (0.25 μCi) incorporation into 20-WAA tissue slice system	110
8 Results of ^{14}C -Mevalonic acid (0.25 μCi) incorporation into 20-WAA tissue slice system	111
9 Results of ^{14}C -Pyruvic acid (0.25 μCi) incorporation into 20-WAA tissue slice system	112
10 Summary of % of incorporation of ^{14}C -substrates into the saponified carotenoid extract of 20-WAA tissue slices	115
11 The incorporation of various ^{14}C -substrates (in %) into the different carotenoid fractions of 20-WAA extracts	118

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1 Overall pathway of isoprenoid biosynthesis (adapted from Bramley <i>et al.</i> , 1993)	11
2 Biosynthesis of phytoene, the first C ₄₀ carotenoid from IPP (adapted from Bartley and Scolnik, 1995)	13
3 Desaturation reactions involving phytoene to form lycopene	15
4 Cyclisation reactions in carotenogenesis	16
5 Absorbance spectra of 17-WAA carotenoid samples extracted with solvent system (1) and (2)	51
6 Absorbance spectra of crude 20-WAA carotenoid extract (non-saponified) and saponified 20-WAA carotenoid extract	52
7 Comparison of the absorbance spectra of saponified carotenoid extracts extracted at various stages of maturity (15-WAA to 20-WAA)	56
8 Standard curve for the commercially acquired β -carotene standard	57
9 Accumulation of β -carotene content at different stages of development in oil palm mesocarp (15-WAA to 20-WAA)	61
10 TLC separation of saponified 20-WAA extract on a non-commercial plate developed with PE:DE (80:20, by vol.) first, before being developed a second time in the same orientation in PE:DE (98:2, by vol.)	63
11 TLC separation of saponified 20-WAA extract on a commercial plate developed with PE:DE (80:20, by vol.) first, before being developed a second time in the same orientation in PE:DE (98:2, by vol.)	64
12 TLC separation of saponified 20-WAA extract on a commercial plate developed with PE:DE (80:20, by vol.) first, before being developed a second time in the same orientation in PE:DE (98:2, by vol.)	67
13 Separation of lycopene standard on the C18 Genesis column with mobile phase ACN:MeOH:DCM (70:10:20)	71
14 Separation of standard mixture of α and β -carotene on the C18 Genesis column with mobile phase ACN:MeOH:DCM (70:10:20)	71

15	Separation of saponified 17-WAA extract on the C18 Genesis column with mobile phase ACN:MeOH:DCM (70:10:20)	71
16	Separation of saponified 15-WAA extract on the C18 Genesis column with mobile phase ACN:MeOH:DCM (70:10:20)	74
17	Separation of saponified 16-WAA extract on the C18 Genesis column with mobile phase ACN:MeOH:DCM (70:10:20)	74
18	Separation of saponified 17-WAA extract on the C18 Genesis column with mobile phase ACN:MeOH:DCM (70:10:20)	74
19	Separation of saponified 18-WAA extract on the C18 Genesis column with mobile phase ACN:MeOH:DCM (70:10:20)	75
20	Separation of saponified 19-WAA extract on the C18 Genesis column with mobile phase ACN:MeOH:DCM (70:10:20)	75
21	Separation of saponified 20-WAA extract on the C18 Genesis column with mobile phase ACN:MeOH:DCM (70:10:20)	75
22	Absorbance spectra for standards β -carotene (19.025 minutes), α -carotene (17.799 minutes), lycopene (10.930 minutes) and β -carotene from 20-WAA extract (19.105 minutes)	76
23	3D chromatogram of saponified 15-WAA extract separated on the C18 Genesis column with mobile phase ACN:MeOH:DCM (70:10:20)	78
24	3D chromatogram of saponified 16-WAA extract separated on the C18 Genesis column with mobile phase ACN:MeOH:DCM (70:10:20)	79
25	3D chromatogram of saponified 17-WAA extract separated on the C18 Genesis column with mobile phase ACN:MeOH:DCM (70:10:20)	80
26	3D chromatogram of saponified 18-WAA extract separated on the C18 Genesis column with mobile phase ACN:MeOH:DCM (70:10:20)	81
27	3D chromatogram of saponified 19-WAA extract separated on the C18 Genesis column with mobile phase ACN:MeOH:DCM (70:10:20)	82
28	3D chromatogram of saponified 20-WAA extract separated on the C18 Genesis column with mobile phase ACN:MeOH:DCM (70:10:20)	83

29	Separation of lycopene standard on the C30 Bischoff column with mobile phase TBME:MeOH:H ₂ O in the ratio of 15:81:4 to 90:6:4 (gradient)	88
30	Separation of standard mixture of α and β -carotene on the C30 Bischoff column with mobile phase TBME:MeOH:H ₂ O in the ratio of 15:81:4 to 90:6:4 (gradient)	88
31	Separation of saponified 15-WAA extract on the C30 Bischoff column with mobile phase TBME:MeOH:H ₂ O in the ratio of 15:81:4 to 90:6:4 (gradient)	91
32	Separation of saponified 16-WAA extract on the C30 Bischoff column with mobile phase TBME:MeOH:H ₂ O in the ratio of 15:81:4 to 90:6:4 (gradient)	91
33	Separation of saponified 17-WAA extract on the C30 Bischoff column with mobile phase TBME:MeOH:H ₂ O in the ratio of 15:81:4 to 90:6:4 (gradient)	92
34	Separation of saponified 18-WAA extract on the C30 Bischoff column with mobile phase TBME:MeOH:H ₂ O in the ratio of 15:81:4 to 90:6:4 (gradient)	92
35	Separation of saponified 19-WAA extract on the C30 Bischoff column with mobile phase TBME:MeOH:H ₂ O in the ratio of 15:81:4 to 90:6:4 (gradient)	93
36	Separation of saponified 20-WAA extract on the C30 Bischoff column with mobile phase TBME:MeOH:H ₂ O in the ratio of 15:81:4 to 90:6:4 (gradient)	93
37	Absorbance spectra for standards β -carotene (41.339 minutes), α -carotene (37.634 minutes), lycopene (74.262 minutes) and β -carotene from 20-WAA extract (41.388 minutes)	94
38	3D chromatogram of saponified 15-WAA extract separated on the C30 Bischoff column with mobile phase TBME:MeOH:H ₂ O in the ratio of 15:81:4 to 90:6:4 (gradient)	97
39	3D chromatogram of saponified 16-WAA extract separated on the C30 Bischoff column with mobile phase TBME:MeOH:H ₂ O in the ratio of 15:81:4 to 90:6:4 (gradient)	98
40	3D chromatogram of saponified 17-WAA extract separated on the C30 Bischoff column with mobile phase TBME:MeOH:H ₂ O in the ratio of 15:81:4 to 90:6:4 (gradient)	99

41	3D chromatogram of saponified 18-WAA extract separated on the C30 Bischoff column with mobile phase TBME:MeOH:H ₂ O in the ratio of 15:81:4 to 90:6:4 (gradient)	100
42	3D chromatogram of saponified 19-WAA extract separated on the C30 Bischoff column with mobile phase TBME:MeOH:H ₂ O in the ratio of 15:81:4 to 90:6:4 (gradient)	101
43	3D chromatogram of saponified 20-WAA extract separated on the C30 Bischoff column with mobile phase TBME:MeOH:H ₂ O in the ratio of 15:81:4 to 90:6:4 (gradient)	102
44	Separation of crude 20-WAA extract on the C30 Bischoff column with mobile phase TBME:MeOH:H ₂ O in the ratio of 15:81:4 to 90:6:4 (gradient)	106
45	Separation of saponified 20-WAA extract on the C30 Bischoff column with mobile phase TBME:MeOH:H ₂ O in the ratio of 15:81:4 to 90:6:4 (gradient)	106

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

$A_{446\text{nm}}$	absorbance at 446nm
ABA	abscisic acid
acetyl-CoA	acetyl coenzyme A
APCI	atmospheric pressure chemical ionization
CI	chemical ionization
DE	diethyl ether
DMAPP	dimethylallyl pyrophosphate
EI	electron impact
ESI	electrospray ionization
FAB	fast atom bombardment
FPP	farnesyl pyrophosphate
G3P	glyceraldehyde-3-phosphate
GGPP	geranylgeranyl pyrophosphate
GPP	geranyl pyrophosphate
HMG-CoA	3-hydroxy-3-methylglutaryl-CoA
HPLC	high pressure/performance liquid chromatography
IPP	isopentenyl pyrophosphate
KOH	potassium hydroxide
λ_{max}	lambda maxima
LCMS	liquid chromatography mass spectrophotometry
LYC	lycopene cyclase
M	Molar
mCi	milliCurie
MES	2 - [N-Morpholino] ethanasulfonic acid

mmol	millimol
MVA	mevalonic acid
N ₂	nitrogen
NMR	nuclear magnetic resonance
PDA	photo-diode array
PDS	phytoene desaturase
PE	petroleum ether
PHA	polyhydroxyalkanoate
PHB	polyhydroxybutyrate
PP	polypropylene
PPPP	prephytoene pyrophosphate
PSY	phytoene synthase
Py	pyruvate
RE	retinol equivalent (a unit to define vitamin A activity of β -carotene as retinol)
RT	retention time
rpm	resolution per minute
TLC	thin layer chromatography
3D	three-dimensional
2D	two-dimensional
μ Ci	microCurie
vol.	volume
WAA	weeks after anthesis
ZDS	zeta-desaturase synthase

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background

Elaeis guineensis, which originated from West and Central Africa, is an agricultural crop that is thriving in Malaysia. Today, palm oil derived from *Elaeis guineensis* is widely used for many commercial purposes. It is used in the making of food (e.g. chocolates & margarine), non-food products (e.g. soaps & cosmetics) and in the near future, as fuel for motor vehicles.

The use of palm oil can be traced back to Egypt during the reign of the Pharaohs. In the mid-15th century, the people of West Africa used the oil extensively for cooking. In South East Asia, oil palm was initially grown as an ornamental plant, but it was planted for commercial purposes when the palm oil export trade developed in the nineteenth century. The seedlings from this humble plant first arrived in South East Asia from West Africa in 1848. The Dutch shipped the seeds from Nigeria to their experimental gardens in Bogor, Java, Indonesia. From there, the oil palm was sent to the Botanical Gardens in Singapore in 1875, and subsequently brought to Malaya (as West Malaysia was then known) in 1878.

Elaeis guineensis is a perennial tree that flourishes in the humid tropics. It fruits all year long and is the highest oil-yielding crop. It produces an average of three to four tonnes of oil per hectare per year. When ripe, its fruits look like lush black berries (each 4-5 cm in length) crowded on short branches and are red at the base of each fruit bunch. The oil palm fruit bunches yield two types of oil: palm oil

and palm kernel oil. Palm oil is extracted from the mesocarp (pulp) of the fruit, which contains 45-55% oil. It is reddish-orange in colour due to its high carotene content ($> 42,000 \mu\text{g } \beta\text{-carotene equivalent/100 g fruit}$), while palm kernel oil is extracted from the kernel of the palm. It is pale yellow in colour.

The first commercial planting of the oil palm tree in Malaya took place in 1917. Today, Malaysia is the world's largest producer and exporter of palm oil. It has 3.4 million hectares of land dedicated to oil palm plantation. In 2000, Malaysia produced 10.8 million tonnes of crude palm oil, of which 90% was exported to more than 100 countries.

Significance of the study

Several studies have shown that carotenoids have an important role to play in the field of medicine, nutrition, agrochemistry and pharmaceuticals. This stems mainly from their antioxidant properties. Therefore, the high carotene content of palm oil adds to the beneficial aspects of the oil palm and the importance of these micronutrients in oil palm should not go unnoticed. Due to its health benefits to humankind, there is a need to further exploit the potential of these useful pigments with the increase in demand from consumers in the future.

The information obtained from this study will contribute towards future efforts in metabolic engineering of oil palm fruits to produce value-added products of commercial interests such as palm oil with high lycopene content or high polyhydroxybutyrate (PHBs) content. Studies have proven that lycopene has potent antioxidant properties which help prevent cancer in man, hence, palm oil high in

lycopene has potential in nutraceutical and pharmaceutical applications, while palm oil rich in PHBs would prove to be a great source for the production of biodegradable plastics.

Objectives of the study

The biosynthesis of carotenoids in plants has been studied since the early 1960s. However, not much effort has been put into studying its synthesis in the oil palm. Therefore in this study, experiments were conducted with the following objectives:

- (1) to optimise the extraction of carotenoids from the oil palm fruit
- (2) to characterise the carotenoid profiles in the oil palm fruits at different stages of development using TLC and HPLC techniques
- (3) to study the biosynthesis of carotenoids in oil palm fruits using various ^{14}C -labelled substrates